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ABSTRACT

Intended for the reluctant writer who finds writing difficult or is unable to put ideas on paper, this guide examines the characteristics of the reluctant writer and suggests strategies for teachers to use when dealing with these characteristics. It also reviews the writing process, categorizes the reluctant writer according to grade level, and provides appropriate writing activities for each level. Each activity contains (1) a statement of its objective, (2) a list of materials needed, (3) the procedure to be followed, and (4) additional suggestions for using the activity. (HOD)

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A GUIDE TO HELPING THE RELUCTANT WRITER

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WISCONSIN WRITING PROJECT 1980

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An

Incomplete Guide

to

Working With The

Reluctant Writer

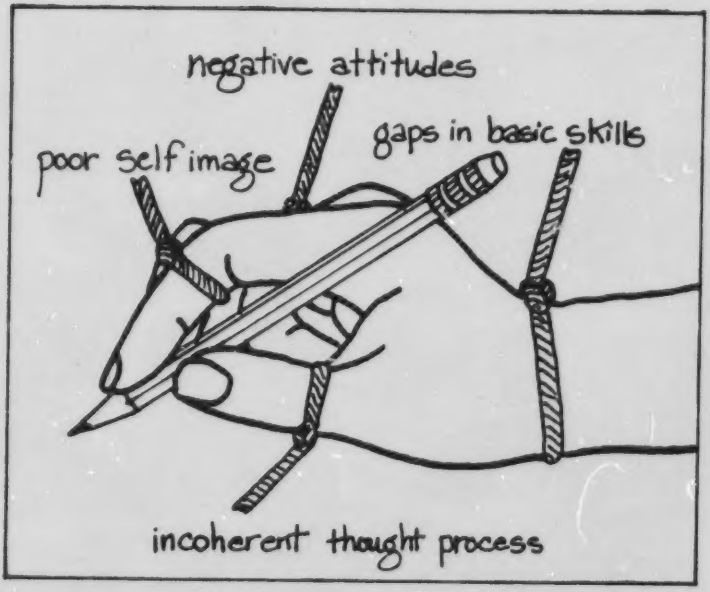
or

"'Wotsinit f'me?'

"Writin' is nuts'

'Ida wanna.'

'I can't.'"*



*Thanks to Clifton Fadiman and James Howard.

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ODE TO THE RELUCTANT WRITER

I can't write today because I lost my pencil.

I can't write today because I feel sick.

I can't write today because my parakeet died.

I can't write today because I wrote yesterday.

I can't write today because my fingers are sore.

I can't write today because my chair squeaks.

I can't write today because I can't think of anything to say.

I can't write today because I don't feel like it.

I can't write today because it's almost time for lunch.

I can't write today because I'd rather draw.

I can't write today because I didn't have any breakfast.

I can't write today because I ripped my paper.

I can't write today because my hands are dirty.

I can't write today because I can't spell.

I can't write today because I can't see the board.

I can't write today because it's too noisy.

I can't write today because I hate writing.

I can't write today because somebody will copy me.

I can't write today because I couldn't get my locker open.

I can't write today because I have to go the bathroom.

I can't write today because the sun is in my eyes.

I can't write today because there's no more room on my paper.

Robin Staudt

A Description of the Reluctant Writer

Reluctant writers find writing difficult and/or meaningless. Their papers come back with discouragingly low grades and corrections they do not understand. Although they are not learning disabled, reluctant writers seem unable to put ideas down on paper and this inability to transfer thoughts causes frustration which leads to apathy. Assignments come in late and incomplete. The writing is void of any clear thought. Reluctant writers do not see any value in attempting to write.

In his book, The English Teacher: Basic Traditions and Successful Innovations, Joseph Meraand lists the following characteristics of the reluctant writer and suggests strategies for teachers to use when dealing with these characteristics.

1. Characteristic: Lack of desire to excel scholastically or intellectually.

   Strategy: Appeal to the student's desire for significant experiences. Make school work appeal to him through the practicality of the assignment. Emphasize life skills in writing.

2. Characteristic: Slow and incoherent thought process. Slow in grasping abstraction.

   Strategy: Break the thought process into smaller steps. Many short writing assignments will be helpful. Begin with the simpler elements and proceed to the more difficult.

3. Characteristic: Lack of self-reliance and initiative. Highly imitative.

Strategy: Emphasize group projects. Use prewriting activities and models to give the student assistance in organizing his thoughts. Class discussions can lead to several writing activities. As the class discusses activities, list on the board ideas which may later serve as an outline or word bank.

4. Characteristic: Anti-school, anti-teacher attitudes.

Strategy: Be generous with praise and approval. In his article "In Praise of Praise," Paul B. Diederich says "The art of teaching--at its best--is the reinforcement of good things." On this premise he suggests teachers should find at least one thing a student has done well in a written assignment and note this to the student. He warns against marking every correction on a paper and suggests choosing a few particular errors which the student may correct. If the student concentrates on one error rather than one hundred errors, he is more likely to make progress. Diederich feels there is more value in a few appreciative comments than in any amount of kind correction.

5. Characteristic: Lacking desirable work and study habits.

Strategy: Homework should be limited, but fully motivated.

Assignments should be well within the grasp of every student. Arrange for the student to have more supervised, in-class work.

A Review of the Writing Process[1]

The areas especially important for the reluctant writer are underlined.
(T=Teacher; S=Student)

I. Pre-writing

T: Introduce topic, concept, atmosphere, ideas.

T&S: Encourage talking about writing, interact with materials, research avenues of interest, "brainstorm," develop ideas verbally.

T&S: Establish audience and vocabulary; firm up purpose for writing.

S: Choose form of writing appropriate to audience and purpose.

II. Composing/Writing

S: Establish opening and appropriate chronological order for presenting thoughts.

S: Select appropriate language and wording; discover alternate word choices.

T: Encourage experimentation.

T: Encourage clarity of thought, spelling; rewrite if needed.

S: Experiment with sentence combining.

T&S: Note grammar usage.

S: Return to stimuli; research if necessary to revise facts, concepts, ideas overlooked, new inclusions to be made.

III. Editing and rewriting

T&S: See if writing reflects earlier choices.

T&S: Check for appropriate and definitive language.

T: Note coherency.

T&S: Proofread for spelling, punctuation, grammar, neatness.

S: Interact with another person on parts of writing that are unclear or confusing.

T: Permit time to elapse between composing and editing and between periods of editing to re-form thoughts, adjust perspective. Let writing "cool off."

S: Double check facts, opinions, descriptions.

S: Try out on sample of intended audience if possible.

S: Strive for clarity, brevity, accuracy as well as richness of language and individualism.

T&S: If necessary--start over.

IV. Sharing and feedback

T&S: Make final copy public--as neat and perfect as possible.

S: Accept audience reactions and responses.

T&S: Note valid criticisms for future improvement.

T&S: Bask in compliments--give yourself two pats on the back.

S: Re-read your own work after a period of time and see if it was really as good as you thought it was.

[1]Extracted from materials developed by the Crestwood Elementary School 4-5 team, Madison, Wisconsin, and the Guide to Teaching the Writing Process from Pre-Writing to Editing, Marjorie Smelstor, ed.,(Wisconsin Writing Project, 1978).

There are innumerable occasions when writing is inescapable: job applications, insurance claims, consumer inquiries, approaches to strangers, letters of condolence, recommendation, technical advice--and love. Young men and women owe it to themselves--to say nothing of their families--to be able to fulfill these requirements and obtain these adjuncts of self-development.

Charles Scribner

Survival Writing

It includes, we may suppose, the ability to put down legibly at least the following: one's name, address, sex, hair and eye color, weight, height, religious affiliation if any, phone number, Social Security number, names of parents or next of kin, bank or other reference, the digits in various combinations, the date, days of the week, the months of the year, and so forth. Survival writing probably includes the ability to commit to paper, with excusable misspellings, a few thousand of the commonest English words, including a few proper names and geographical nouns, together with a minimum capacity to manipulate this vocabulary in short, understandable sentences. Survival writers should be able to record telephone messages, and fill out common forms.... Survival writers also should be able to write brief job-application letters, free of errors....Survival writers also should be able to make legible lists of goods they normally consume...[and] write brief but comprehensible letters required at certain important moments in life...advising distant relatives of a death...requesting a job reference, requesting a transcript of school grades....

Clifton Fadiman and James Howard
Empty Pages, p. 56.

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"...the teenager or adult who becomes literate has to learn the same things in the same basic ways as the smallest tyke."

James Moffett and
Betty Jane Wagner

Don't picture growth as a ladder or a series of stepping stones, because these metaphors imply that the learner leaves behind the learning as he acquires new. Most learning is never shed but, rather, becomes assimilated or transformed into more advanced skills and knowledge.

James Moffett and
Betty Jane Wagner

The Reluctant Writer
Primary Grades (K-3)

Reluctant writers have skills that are essential for communication. They have the power to extract, that is, they can make words function for themselves. They have the power to transform, that is they can recognize and communicate words from a given perspective. When someone says, "This is my apple," a listener will be able to respond with, "I agree. That is your apple." Reluctant writers have the power to abstract, that is, they not only extract words from everything they hear, but they attach new meanings to the words. They can stress and ignore in processing language. They ignore pitch to comprehend words.[1] Thus these writers do have a foundation in communication on which we can build. There is always some place to start, some ability that will allow these writers to integrate what they are being taught with what they already know. Four to seven year olds have an extensive oral vocabulary (thousands of words, in fact), an ability to perceive sounds, nuances and emotions as expressed by the human voice and an awareness of shape. This is primarily what children need to begin writing.

The teacher should encourage more sophisticated sound awareness (phonics), help children develop more accurate shape

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[1] Caleb Gattegno. What We Owe Children New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970.

awareness (of letters and words), and offer opportunities to scribble paint and draw (penmanship). At this level young children begin to attach words and phrases to actions and representations. This is a crucial time for providing a myriad of new and reinforcing first-hand experiences, always with accompanying vocabulary. Beginning writers should be encouraged to verbalize, to become aware of synonyms, opposites, adjectives, nouns, word families, word roots, adverbs, verbs--all the aspects of words and what can be done with them. Finally, young children are developing perspective about self and about the world in which they live. They are learning to communicate opinions, observations, ideas and conclusions. Nurturing children's desire to communicate is a powerful deterrant against developing reluctance in writing.

Writing Activities For The Primary Grades

1. "Our Class On A Big Wall"[1]

Objective:

To describe self in words and pictures.

Materials:

-Large paper roll. Paper should be at least 5 to 8 feet long, and as tall as the tallest child in the class. You also need a wall in the room or hall that will be long enough to display the mural.

-Magic markers, crayons, drawing pencils to make outlines and features on them if the children wish.

Procedure:

-After each child has had his outline completed, cut out and color features or clothing, mount the outlines on a long strip of paper. Arrange the outlines so when the mural is completed it looks like a group photo, not only are children side by side, but in front and in back of each other.

-Have children write their name on their outline and then add a list of descriptive words (adjectives) about themselves.

-Older students may write complete sentences or even paragraphs to place on their outlines.

Further activities:

Play games with the mural. For example: "Who Am I?" with

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[1]Adapted from an idea in The Good Apple Creative Writing Book by Grimm and Mitchell, p. 95. Many creative ideas are included in this book. More complete details for the examples listed here are included.

only the descriptive words given. Others read to discover who is being identified.

2. "Put Your Name Up In Letters"[2]

Objective:

To describe self through word and picture name collage.

Materials:

-Large construction paper or oaktag letters for each child's name.

-Magazines or papers to cut up for pictures or words.

-Drawing paper, crayons, magic markers.

Procedure:

-Give each child the letters for his name. They must be arranged in correct order on a large sheet of paper. Paste the letters on the large paper.

-Children cut out pictures of things they like (food, clothing, activities, animals, colors, etc.) to paste on the letters or they may draw appropriate pictures.

-Encourage children to find words or letters to spell out words of things they like in addition to pictures. The words make a more interesting product.

-Pictures and words are then pasted on the letters.

-Display collages so students can look at them and discover information about classmates.

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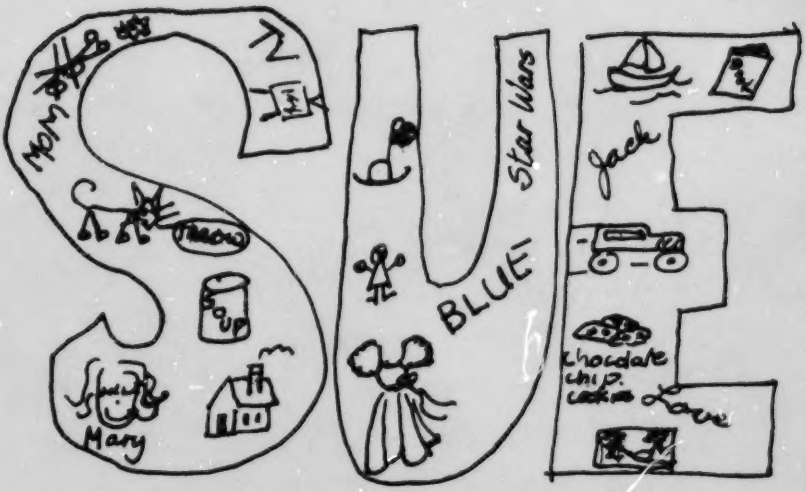
[2]Idea adapted from The Good Apple Creative Writing Book by Grimm and Mitchell, p.22.



Example: "Put Your Name Up In Letters"

3. "Create A Cinquain About Yourself."[3]

Objective: To describe self through poetry.

Materials:

-Pencil and paper.

-If necessary, a "word bank" of adjectives and verbs.

Procedure:

-Each child dictates a cinquain to the teacher and then copies the cinquain.

-Older children can write their own with help from the "word bank."

-The order for the cinquain is:

Line 1	student's name
Line 2	2 descriptive adjectives about the student
Line 3	3 verbs pertaining to favorite activities or other typical actions
Line 4	simile about self (like a, as a)
Line 5	synonym for first line (can rhyme).

Mary
blonde, tall
playing, eating, reading
as good as gold
wary.

Joey
mean, tough
working, swimming, eating
like a football player
showy.

[3]Adapted from idea in The Good Apple Creative Writing Book by Grimm and Mitchell, p. 25.

4. "Expressing Feelings And Ideas"

Objective:

To provide practice in combining words into sentences, copying words.

Materials:

-Drawing or writing paper without lines.

-Crayons or pencils or markers.

Procedure:

-Each child draws a picture to illustrate the sentence

"The most beautiful thing in the world to me is...."
or
"The most awful thing that ever happened to me was...."

-Children are given copies of their dictated responses and write on the paper on which the picture was drawn.

-Pages of drawings are bound together to make a class book which is available in class reading area.

5. "Take a Picture Walk"[4]

Materials:

-Camera

Procedure:

-Take a photograph walk. Have students decide on which views to take. They might even manipulate the camera after being shown how to do so.

-After pictures are developed children look at them and title them. Titles are written down by the teacher. Children copy them to put with photos on class display. Descriptive sentences are encouraged.

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[4]Adapted from a suggested activity in Children Learn to Communicate by Sara Lundsteen, p. 234.

6. "It Means About The Same Thing"

Objective:

To discover alternative words for ones commonly used.

Materials:

-Large 9 X 18 sheets of construction paper.

-Magic markers.

Procedures:

Children offer commonly used words such as "large" or "little" or "good." They are encouraged to discover words which can be used instead of the common ones to make language more interesting but still convey a similar meaning. This is a good activity for parents and families to help children learn new words.

-As the alternative words are discovered, they are written on charts which are headed with the words commonly used.

-Post the charts around the room for reference when writing.

7. "Letter Books"

Objective:

To assist children in becoming more aware of beginning consonants, vowels, and combinations of letters to make words.

Materials:

-Books with construction paper covers and lined writing paper pages cut in the shapes of nouns used to illustrate letter sounds. Examples are a banana shaped book for "b," an octopus shaped book for "o," a table shaped book for "t."

-Children have their own books and write words containing examples of the sound being studied.

-Children cut out and assemble books themselves so doing the activity re-inforces learning.

8. "Interesting Objects"

Objective:

To extend skills in observing, comparing, describing.

Materials:

-Collection of everyday objects emphasizing variety in texture, color, shape, perhaps smell, weight.

Process:

-Children choose 2 or 3 objects and describe them as completely as possible, using name, use, texture, color, smell, weight, etc.

-In conjunction with the children's descriptions the teacher can supply additional words, to extend the children's vocabulary by associating words with the actual object.

-Objects could include: cotton, unusual comb, sugar lump, container of talcum powder, lemon, orange, swatch of fabric, hair clip, clothes pin, tinfoil, clear plastic bottle cap, beer can, paperclip, newspaper, electric cord, wild bird feed, fancy dishtowel, container of baking soda, soap flakes, fancy dress sandal, wristwatch.

9. "Mad Scientist"

Objective:

To extend skills in observing, comparing, describing.

Materials:

-Variety of containers with a different liquid in each.

-Small dishes or saucers.

-Paper towels, or other absorbent paper.

-Eyedroppers, spoons, tongue depressers for stirring.

-Non-absorbent surfaces such as plastic or glass.

Process:

-Children observe liquids and describe them as to appearance. The teacher can provide extra words and synonyms.

-Liquids may be dropped on different surfaces and results described.

-Liquids can be mixed on saucers and results observed and described.

-Some ideas for liquids are milk, water, vinegar, salad oil, car oil, soft drink, fruit juice, alcohol, bleach, tea, coffee, molasses, syrup, corn syrup, Koolaid, lemon juice.

Note: These activities generate primarily oral responses to observations. Descriptions could be written as well. The activities may be extended by classifying objects in the first, and liquids in the second, with children providing their own "rule" for classifying. The important part of both are the words that the teacher supplies to supplement those already familiar to the children.

10. "Artful Words"

Objective:

To familiarize children with words through picture clues.

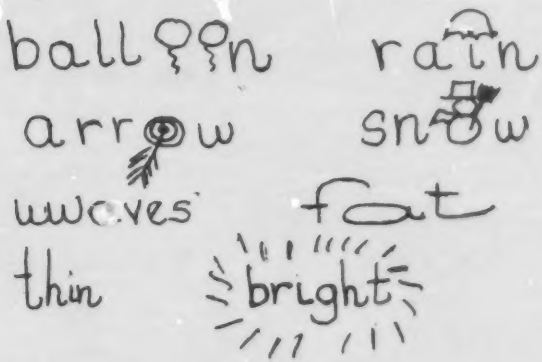
Materials for Artful Words:[5]

-paper, pencil, crayon or markers.

-dictionaries or word lists.

Procedure:

-Children choose words that can include a picturization of the word meaning in the word itself.



[5]Idea adapted from Language Arts Activities for the Classroom, by Sidney and Iris Tiedt.

11. "Write Your Own Story"

Materials:

-pencils and 3" X 5" pieces of paper

-commercially made short supplementary beginning readers. (Books similar to those in the set Super Books by Joanne Nelson and the Phonics Readers, Modern Curriculum Press are good.)

Procedure:

-Children read the stories as written.

-After reading, children use the cards to write their own sentences to accompany the picture on each page of the book. They must not copy the sentences already there, but can use the words in their own sentences.

12. "It Doesn't Fit"

Objective:

To develop early paragraphing sense and keep main idea within a paragraph.

Materials:

Children listen to the paragraph read and identify the sentence that does not belong.

Note: For older children this could be made into a written activity.

13. "Tell Me About It"

Objective:

To start beginning writers composing stories.

Materials:

-Pencil.

-Picture cards with one object on the card and one, or, a few words accompanying the picture.

Procedure:

Students choose cards with pictures on them and write stories to accompany pictures. Encourage rebus writing if writers balk at words.

Story

The nest is in a . See the fly. The birds fly to the . The has a baby.

The Reluctant Writer
Intermediate Grades (4-6)

Intermediate grade reluctant writers are generally students who spent their primary years in remedial programs and "low" ability achievement groups. Their initial enthusiasm for school experiences has waned greatly with the passing of time, and activities and/or class presentations which are lengthy in nature tend to turn them off completely. Since their ability to motivate themselves may be very low or completely missing at this point, their relationships with their teachers become more important than ever. Students who are generally bored and/or frustrated with school, but who have good personal relationships with their teachers may work to achieve far beyond what was thought to be their limited potential.

Before presenting the stages of writing to be followed with these types of students, the following recommendations should be noted:

1. Many reluctant writers are shy and/or reserved. Many have had prior difficulties communicating with their peers and teachers. Don't force communication with these students, but make sure that the "door" is always open. Note boxes or suggestion boards may serve as a method for communication.

2. Try to minimize activities of a competitive nature. Instead, have the student earn points towards a specific goal, i.e., choice day in P.E., additional recess time, etc.

In other words, the student should compete only with himself.

3. Give this student the opportunity to work in potentially successful situations with younger children in other classes (first grade reading programs, or math helpers, etc.). Activities of this nature can build self-esteem and may serve as pre-writing settings for future short writing assignments.

4. Teachers should try to stay informed about current events which have special importance to students (i.e., sports events and personalities, or television programs and their stars). Even the most "turned off" student will sit up and take notice when Fonzie's name is brought up as part of a class discussion--even when it's connected with her least favorite subject. It means a great deal to students when their teachers care enough about them to relate to them in this way.

5. "Homegrown" certificates of achievement are prized by students at this level. They do not have to be expensively manufactured by an outside source, and many students will work that much harder if they know that a certificate or ribbon lauding their achievement is waiting for them at the end. A "point" or contract system with certificates or ribbons at its conclusion can be very valuable to students at this age.

6. If competition is necessary, with ribbons or prizes awarded, issue "certificates of participation" to all.

7. Involve parents of reluctant writers as much as possible in the writing program. A short newsletter may be helpful to inform parents unable to assist in person. This may also serve as a method of reaching parents who had poor school experiences and are reluctant to become involved in their children's education.

8. Devise a list of new adjectives to use when evaluating student's work. Try to avoid "good,""very good," and "excellent"whenever possible. Short sentences of a positive nature will motivate the student much more effectively.

9. Partner evaluations of short stories may sometimes be more motivating than teacher criticism.

Writing Activities for Grades 4-6

The following activities are recommended for working with the reluctant writer in the intermediate grades.

1. "The Radio Interview"

Objective:

To acquaint students with other class members and prepare them for biographical writing.

Materials:

A pencil, paper, and a good imagination.

Procedure:

Arrange students in pairs. One student serves as the "news personality," and interviews his partner, using a list of recommended questions issued by the teacher or compiled by the class. When the private interview has been completed, the interviewer and partner will give a short summary of the information received. Since the interviewer will be doing most of the talking, it makes the procedure more fun (and more bearable for the shy student) if he can "become" a famous news personality. ("This is Walter Cronkite of CBS, and I am interviewing . . .")

Additional Suggestions:

- This is a good first-day activity, especially in a class in which there are many new students, or a teacher new to the building. It also serves to acquaint students who sometimes

confine their friendships to one or two people with others they might not ordinarily have much contact with.

-A short paragraph describing their experiences and feelings regarding this activity would be a valuable writing exercise.

-If the teacher is new to the building, s/he may be "interviewed" also.

2. "Spelling Mountains"

Objective:

To make students aware of the correct spellings for words or to introduce new vocabulary words into a unit.

Materials:

Pencil and paper.

Procedure:

Begin with one letter, preferably a vowel.

e
he
hem
them
theme

The student should be able to make a new word on each level by adding one letter.

Additional examples:

t	i
to	it
tow	sit
stow	site

Additional Suggestions:

-This activity may be geared to a particular subject--building prefixes or suffixes in language arts, or adding to science or social studies vocabulary lists.

-The number of letters added per line may vary.

-This is an excellent device for generating new vocabulary words. In addition, students could keep short vocabulary booklets handy--listing the new words with brief definitions. A point system could be useful to motivate students in this activity.

Source:

The Good Apple Spelling Book, published by Good Apple Publishers.

3. "The Sentence Scrabble Game"

Objective:

To give students visual practice in recognizing complete and incomplete sentences.

Materials:

Materials necessary will be detailed in the procedure, since the class will participate in making them.

Procedure:

-This game closely resembles Scrabble, but involves the use of words in each square, rather than single letters.

-The teacher constructs a game board, much like a Scrabble board, except that each space has a particular point value. (It is fun to widely vary the point totals in each square, so that short sentences may sometimes be just as or more valuable than long sentences).

-Compile a set of word squares. (300-400 are recommended). This is a somewhat lengthy process, and may best be accomplished over a period of several weeks rather than in one class period. Groups of students could work in particular areas. One group could produce only nouns, another verbs, another adjectives, etc., with all parts of speech included in the final project.

-Include a large supply of the following words: a, the, and, or, in, out, up, down. (Twenty of each would be satisfactory.)

-If the group of students is too young or unable to deal with the complexity of this task, perhaps older students

could assist them.

-The game is played like a regular Scrabble game, with members of each team verifying that a sentence is complete before points are awarded. (Twenty squares are given to each player.)

Additional Suggestions:

-Production of the game may seem like a long and arduous task, but its uses are almost limitless in terms of various subject material. Over the years, new classes could contribute new word squares to the existing word pool.

-It is recommended that the teacher examine the words which each group is contributing to make sure that they are appropriate for class use.

4. "Using the newspaper to teach order & sequence"

Objective:

To give students practice in deciding the order in which events should take place in a news article.

Materials:

Newspapers, envelopes, glue, and blank paper.

Procedure:

Each student receives an envelope containing a newspaper article which has been cut apart into paragraphs. It is his/her job to read the paragraphs carefully and paste them onto paper in the best order.

Additional Suggestions:

-The students could write their own news stories about school news or class events, cut them up, and exchange them for use in the same method.

-Younger students could work on sequencing the sentences within a paragraph. It is recommended that these be written out by the teacher.

5. "Keeping a daily log"

Objective:

To make each student fully aware of the day's activities and to show them all of the possibilities for writing activities within a day's work.

Materials:

Pencil and Paper (and eight hours of sleep!)

Procedure:

-The students take turns keeping a log of the day's events. The format and general contents of this journal are decided by the teacher.

-The logs should include both serious and humorous events which take place in the class on a given day and may be bound together by weeks.

Additional Suggestions:

-Students derive a great deal of enjoyment at the end of the school year when they read through their logs.

-This record-keeping system is also useful for organizing make-up assignments for students who have been absent.

-Illustrations may accompany the day's events if the recorder is so inclined, or he may ask someone to assist him in this area.

The Reluctant Writer
Middle Grades (6-8)

Reluctant writers in the middle school are at a crucial point in their lives. It is during these years that they will solidify their attitudes toward writing. Will they see it as a necessary, vital form of communication, or will they view writing as tedious and dull? The teacher can guide their young, uncertain persons onto the "write" road by:

-establishing an accepting, stress free environment in which to write.

-helping students find a purpose for writing.

-giving students frequent, brief and meaningful writing experiences.

-involving students in genuine communication through practical, informational writing.

-helping students feel respected, loved, understood, forgiven, and accepted.

-providing students with writing activities that they <u>can</u> do and that will give them a feeling of success.

-helping students develop a sense of audience.

-supplying a balance of structured and unstructured writing tasks.

-providing activities based on the major factors which contribute to effective writing: vocabulary, elaboration, organization, and structure.

-helping students become involved in evaluating their own writing.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE RELUCTANT WRITER IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

A. SELF AWARENESS

1. "Personal Coat of Arms"

Objective:

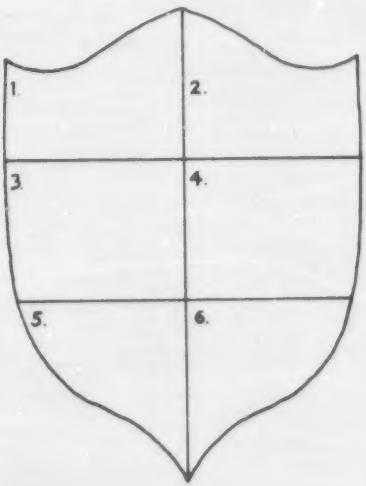
To help students discover what they value and who they are .

Materials:

Heavy weight construction paper, markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Procedure:

-Duplicate sheets with the design below and distribute them to students. Ask each to create a personal coat of arms by making a drawing, design or symbol in the appropriate section. This drawing should express students' responses to these concerns.



1. What is one thing that other people can do to make you happy?
2. Draw three things you are good at.
3. Express in a drawing the most significant event in your life to date.
4. What one thing would you want to accomplish by the time you are 65?
5. Design a symbol that stands for you.
6. Express in a drawing your greatest achievement in the past year.

Additional Suggestions:

Emphasize that artwork doesn't count. This is a personal coat of arms, so drawings need to be meaningful only to the individual student. Concerns can be adapted to suit various grade levels and/or student needs.

Source:

Adapted from Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students by Sidney B. Simon, Leland Howe and Howard Kirschenbaum. New York: Hart Publishing, 1972. p. 278.

2. "The Who Am I? Game"

Objective:

Self-awareness.

Materials:

A friend, a way of timing one minute, writing supplies.

Procedure:

-Divide class into pairs and ask each couple to sit facing each other somewhere in the room. First, one student must ask the other, "Who are you?" over and over until one minute is up. The answer must be different each time.

-For example: "Who are you?" "A girl."
"Who are you?" "A daughter."
"Who are you?" "A pet owner."
"Who are you?" "A 'Star Trek' watcher."
"Who are you?" "A swimmer."

-This is a verbal exchange. When a minute is up, the student who has answered the question will list as many of her responses as she can remember. (Her partner can help.) Next, students switch roles so that partners can make lists. A minute may seem like forever to some students. Encourage them to stay with it and search for different ways to describe themselves. When lists are completed give students the opportunity to add other things they think belong on the list. Then give them these directions:

1. Sort the list. Put an A next to those things that describe you in relation to other people (sister, friend). Put a B next to those things that describe what you do

(roller skater, beer can collector). Put a C next to the things that describe your qualities (funny person, smart kid). Which group is the biggest? Why? Can you add new qualities to your shortest list? What does this list tell you about yourself?

2. Design a "me collage" using the words from your list. Put your name in the center of a piece of construction paper and arrange your list of words around it in a design. This will be an "all-that-you-are-poster."

Additional Suggestions:

This list can be used in a variety of ways. Try using it as part of an autobiographical prewriting experience. Incorporate it into a student designed greeting card. Use it as a beginning of the year ice breaker.

Source:

Burns, Marilyn. I Am Not a Short Adult: Getting Good at Being a Kid, Boston: Little, Brown and Company: 1977, p.13.

3. "Name Tagging"

Objective:

Self-awareness.

Materials:

Name tag (see next page), straight pins, pencil.

Procedure:

Duplicate a facsimile of the card below or have students divide large index cards into appropriate sections. Students must write their first name in large letters in the middle of the card and then fill in the surrounding boxes with self-describing words and phrases. Each box calls for a specific response:

-List three words ending in "able" which describe you (sociable, reliable, etc.).

-Name one thing you're proud of.

-List one aspect of yourself that you'd like to change.

-Name the thing you treasure most.

-Tell one thing that makes you happy; one thing that makes you sad.

-Name one activity you like to do alone; one thing you like to do with a group.

After filling out cards, students pin them to their clothes. They may then circulate throughout the room sharing their cards with others.

Additional Suggestions:

Here is an option for students who are reluctant to share these personal facts with others. On the reverse side of the

card the student may write his name and surround it with six specific facts about himself: address, height, weight, phone number, kinds of pets, names and ages of family members, etc. He may then choose the side of the card he wishes the group to see and pin it to his clothes.

"ABLES" - 3	PROUD ABOUT - 1	SELF CHANGE - 1
N A M E		
MOST TREASURED THING -	WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY - SAD -	WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO ALONE - IN A GROUP -

Source:

Adapted from Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students by Sidney B. Simon, Leland Howe and Howard Kirschenbaum. New York: Hart Publishing, 1972.

B. WORD DISCOVERY

1. "Brown Bag It"

Objective:

To provide practice in identifying word classes and sentence building.

Materials:

Four large brown paper bags, paper cut into 5"x18" squares, pencils.

Procedure:

Prepare four large brown paper bags with the following labels: ADJECTIVES, NOUNS, VERBS, ADVERBS. Give four pieces of white paper (approximately 5"x18") to each student, asking the class members to contribute at least one of each kind of word to its proper bag. Encourage the use of a variety of unusual and interesting nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives. When the bags are filled, allow four students at a time to form a sentence by choosing one word from each bag. The team reads the sentence (adding any necessary structure words) and may rearrange the words if they can show the class another sentence. Continue, calling on four more students in the same manner. More complex sentences can be made by incorporating more than one adjective or adverb, with compound verbs, etc.

Additional Suggestions:

It's a good idea to check students' papers before they are deposited in the bags. Incorrect or confusing words can be changed so that the game will run smoothly. Timing teams

to see how fast they can build accurate sentences adds an exciting dimension to this activity.

Source:

Forte, Imogene, Marjorie Frank, and Joy MacKenzie. Kids' Stuff, Nashville, Tennessee: Incentive Publications, 1973. p.226.

2. "Magic Telegrams"

Objective:

To reinforce skills in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.

Materials:

Clock or timer, writing supplies.

Procedure:

Instruct class to form a circle and take out pencils and paper. The teacher will read ten letters of the alphabet, one by one, and the students will write them down, leaving a space after each. For example, if the teacher calls the letters N,D,C,T,L,F,S,A,P, and J, the students' papers will look like this:

N_____D_____C_____T_____

L_____F_____S_____A_____

P_____J_____.

Any ten letters may be chosen, but steer away from X,Z, or too many vowels. The object of the game is to fill in a word after each letter to compose a message for a "magic telegram." After eight or ten minutes, each player is asked to read her magic telegram. Many will be funny and nonsensical.

Additional Suggestions:

Students may take more interest in this activity when a particular subject is assigned or agreed upon, or if the telegram is being "sent" to a particular person.

Source:

Hurwitz, Abraham B., and Arthur Goddard. Games to Improve Your Child's English, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969. p. 199.

C. SENTENCE STRUCTURE

1. "Completing Unfinished Sentences"

Objective:

To provide practice for students who have trouble writing sentences.

Materials:

Worksheet based on sample below, writing supplies.

Procedure:

Ask students to complete the following sentences with groups of words that are imaginative, fun, and original:

1. Just ahead of me, reared a huge ugly _____.
2. The grizzly charged, I pulled the trigger, and _____.
3. Today, the cat _____.
4. _____ after the storm ended.
5. _____ into the center of _____.
6. That is a very _____.
7. I haven't seen Bob since _____.
8. I feel uneasy when _____.
9. Never again would I _____.
10. _____ a narrow trail.

Additional Suggestions:

Students could use a completed sentence as an idea or starter to a story.

Source:

Gerbrandt, Gary L. An Idea Book for Acting Out and Writing Language, Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974. p.43.

2. "Scrambled Sentences"

Objective:

To increase the student's sense of sentence structure.

Materials:

Worksheet based on sample below, writing supplies.

Procedure:

Ask each student to write as many sentences as possible for each scrambled sentence without adding anything to a word, subtracting anything from a word, adding new words, or taking out words. Ending and internal punctuation should be added.

1. home Lake on our summer is Michigan
2. is subject math her favorite
3. shorter two Sarah girls the is of the
4. garage shall I lock door the
5. we after game the the bus boarded
6. go Heidi to game the did you
7. home city our in oldest that is the
8. good on a evening reading winter I novel enjoy a
9. driver policeman questioned the the
10. at are mints coins country's the made

Additional Suggestions:

Place kids in small groups and ask each group to make as many correct sentences for each scrambled sentence as possible.

Source:

Gary Gerbrandt, p.54.

3. "Fortunately, Unfortunately"

Objective:

To provide a model for writing complete sentences.

Materials:

Writing supplies.

Procedure:

Read a few "fortunately-unfortunately" sentences to the class to inspire students to come up with their own. Students can share ideas orally before writing their favorites on paper.

FORTUNATELY, I GOT OUT OF SCHOOL EARLY.

UNFORTUNATELY, I HAD A DENTAL APPOINTMENT.

FORTUNATELY, WE WENT TO A BREWER'S GAME.

UNFORTUNATELY, IT RAINED.

Additional Suggestions:

Compile sentences in a book form with illustrations.

4. "Word-by-Word Stories"

Objective:

To reinforce students' ability to fit words together to form sentences and paragraphs.

Materials:

Newspapers, writing supplies.

Procedure:

Divide the class into groups of two or three and give each group a sheet of newspaper. Each group will make up a story using only words found in the newspaper. First one student will choose a word, then another group member will choose a word and so on, alternating words, making sentences to tell a story. Give groups sufficient time to build a strong story beginning. Group members should copy down the sentences as they are formed. Instruct students to take the story beginning and finish it on their own. Finished stories can then be shared and compared with group members on the following day.

Additional Suggestions:

Vocabulary or spelling words can take the place of a newspaper.

Source:

Adapted from a Good Apple workshop hand-out.

5. "Board Talk"

Objective:

To provide "pair practice" in building sentences.

Materials:

Chalkboard, chalk, writing supplies.

Procedure:

Ask two volunteers to come to the board. The pair will create a sentence on the blackboard by alternating words. First one student will write a word, then the other student will add a word. Continue this procedure until a sentence is completed. Invite at least four more pairs of students to create board sentences. Class members can choose one of the sentences to use as a story starter; to incorporate some or all of the sentences into a narrative; or to write a word-by-word story with a partner.

Suggestions:

Students should correct spelling and punctuation in each sentence. They could improve sentences by adding different modifiers, adverbial phrases and so on.

Source:

Adapted from Joe Nayman's Good Apple workshop hand out.

6. "Sentence Combining"

Objective:

To give students practice in producing more complex sentences.

Materials:

Teacher samples, writing supplies.

Procedure:

Write a series of short, choppy sentences on the blackboard or overhead. Demonstrate to students how words can be pruned and combined to form more flowing, informative sentences. Encourage students to share their own combinations with the class. Example:

The boy ate a popsicle.

The boy was hungry.

The boy was smiling.

The popsicle was orange.

The popsicle was cold.

Possible result: The hungry smiling boy ate a cold orange popsicle.

Suggestions:

Sentence combining is a complex and successful approach to teaching sentence structure. See Marv Klein's Teaching Sentence Structure and Sentence Combining in the Middle Grades for excellent, detailed directions for teaching sentence combining.

D. PARAGRAPHING/SEQUENCING

1. "Pull-It-Together Activities"

Objective:

To provide practice in structuring thoughts and sequencing ideas.

Materials:

Photographs or pictures that can be used to tell stories, adding machine tape or long strips of paper, crayons, markers or colored pencils, writing supplies.

Procedure:

-The teacher begins a story orally: "Once there was an old woman who could see into the future. . ." One by one students add a sentence of their own, building the sentences into an oral story. Going around the room gives every student a chance to contribute and the last student can add a concluding sentence.

-The teacher provides a series of pictures. Students may put them in order and tell a story about them orally. A sentence can be written about each picture and pulled together into a paragraph.

-The teacher displays a picture and ten sentences, three of which do not pertain to the picture. Students pick the accurate sentences and arrange them in sequential order.

-The teacher provides one story picture with six to eight scrambled sentences that tell about the picture. Students sort and write the sentences in sequential order, incorporating them into paragraphs.

-The students choose a favorite book and write down the major events of the plot in sequential order. Divide paper into boxes; using one box for each written event accompanied by an illustration. The result will be a "comic strip" type sequential re-telling of a favorite book or story.

-The teacher reads an open-ended story and asks group to brainstorm possible endings. Individual students can develop and write endings.

Additional Suggestions:

These activities leave room for flexibility. Each can be adapted to fit the needs of a particular student.

Source:

Based on a Wisconsin Writing Project hand-out on paragraph development.

E. PARAGRAPH COMBINING/WRITTEN WORK

1. "Cultural Journalism"

Objective:

To help students learn a variety of basic skills that have significance outside the school setting.

a. A "roots" exercise.

Materials:

Receptive families, tape recorder (optional), writing supplies.

Procedure:

Encourage students to talk with family members to collect family memories and traditions that go back as many years as possible. This material may evolve into stories about the family and where it came from, family trees, scrapbooks and personal anecdotes. Using tape recorders may help students organize their writing and capture the true flavor of their own family.

b. A cookbook of family favorites.

Materials:

Helpful community, writing supplies.

Procedure:

Instruct students to collect recipes from their family, neighbors and friends. These recipes should be the "all-time favorites" and could be accompanied by the name of the cook and any family or cultural traditions. In compiling the book and sharing some of the foods, students will be able to explore family history and the ethnic variation in

that history.

c. A project on "other childhoods."

Materials:

Willing adult friends or family, tape recorder, pencil, paper.

Procedure:

Encourage students to tape record interviews with adult friends or family about their childhoods. Interviews should include such questions as: "What kinds of games did you play when you were young?" "What was your school like?" "What kind of clothing did you wear?" The interviews can then be written up and compiled into book form or used as a basis for stories about other times.

Additional Suggestions:

Many "Foxfire" activities can be adapted to fit particular grade levels. These activities can make students feel that what they do is for real rather than just for drill.

Source:

Sitton, Thad, "The Fire That Lit up Learning," Teacher, March, 1979. p.65.

F. PARAGRAPH COMBINING/WRITTEN WORK

1. "Letter Writing:

Objective:

To reinforce the use of correct letter writing skills.

Materials:

Writing supplies, stationery (optional), envelopes, stamps.

Procedure:

Review the format and function of a friendly letter. Encourage students to talk about their favorite "superstar"--a TV personality, baseball hero, rock group idol. Supply address sheet (see below) so that students may send a friendly letter to their favorite person. Remind students that since stars receive hundreds of letters, a careless, sloppy letter might not be read. The envelope must be neatly and accurately addressed (with a legible return address) to ensure a response. Many addresses can be obtained in movie magazines. TV and movie personalities can usually be reached in care of their motion picture or television studio.

ABC-TV
1330 Avenue of the Americas
New York City, New York 10019

CBS-TV
51 West 52nd St.
New York City, New York 10019

NBC-TV
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York City, New York 10019

RCA Records
6363 Sunset Blvd.
Hollywood, California 90028

ICM (International Creative Management)
8899 Beverly Blvd.
Los Angeles, California 90048

Universal Studios
100 Universal City Plaza
Universal City, California 91608

Amateur Athletic Union of the U.S.
3400 W. 86th St.
Indianapolis, Indiana 46268

Additional Suggestions:

Remind students that it is impossible for a celebrity to write a personal answer to everyone. Most will receive some kind of a response. It may be a long time coming; however, it's worth the wait!

2. "Let your phone book do the teaching"

Objective:

To help students become more familiar with the telephone directory and its many uses.

Materials:

Phone books (try to scrounge up as many current directories as possible but oldies will work, too), writing supplies, drawing materials.

Procedure:

-Have students list what they think are the five most important numbers in the telephone book. After discussing the possibilities, have the class come to a consensus on the five most important numbers. Discuss why these particular numbers were chosen. Have students design a telephone "bookmark" or insert using the five most important numbers. Several of the inserts could be duplicated and sent home for parents to use as a supplement to home phone books.

-Instruct students to design a yellow pages advertisement for one of the following: restaurant, pet store, barber shop, funeral home.

-Ask students to make lists of all the information they can find in a telephone directory. There'll be phone numbers, naturally, but what else? These lists can be used as models for creating a class directory. This could include the standard information, a yellow pages section, city map, etc..

Additional Suggestions:

How about reviewing good old proper telephone manners?

Source:

Based on ideas by Sharon Carter in Good Apple workshop handout.

3. "Real Life Activities for the Reluctant Writer"

Objective:

To provide the reluctant writer with additional writing experiences that are practical and relate to life experiences.

Procedure:

Assign any or all of the following activities to students in hopes of inspiring positive writing attitudes:

-Make a time line showing the major events in your life.

-Consider yourself your own #1 best resource. Make a list of all the skills, interests, and abilities you have.

-Imagine and write horoscopes for each of the astrological signs for this month.

-Work with other students to create a guide for new middle schoolers. Include a typical day in the life of a middle school student, a school lay-out, your suggestions and advice on dealing with life as a middle schooler.

-Design your own personalized license plate.

-Keep a journal of a vacation trip.

-Write a TV guide to a typical day in your life.

-Write a letter to the President stating your feelings about the job he's doing.

-Create a picture book for a favorite little friend.

-Stop buying greeting cards! Make your own. They will be one-of-a-kind.

-Write directions on how to get from your house to your favorite restaurant.

-Write a script for a"KIDS ONLY"radio program.

-Create a list of ways that kids can make money during the summer.

-Make up an original recipe using only foods grown or produced in your state.

-Keep a record or a time chart for one day in your life.

-Discover where your time really goes.

-Write a review of your favorite movie or television program.

-Interview someone in your town who has a job that you think is interesting.

-Visit a factory or business and write a report on one aspect of its day to day operation.

-Poll your friends to find out their opinions on a current event. Write up the results and submit to your school newspaper.

4. "Dictation"

-Dictation is a practice that will work with some students at the middle school level. There are some students who simply can't get into the act of actually writing down their own thoughts. For these students and even for some students who do write, teachers can act as scribes. Teachers should try to take down the words used by the student as accurately as possible. But in the process, the teacher can probe and remind students of ideas already expressed, suggest alternatives (but always within the students' frame of reference), and help the students organize their thoughts. The activity may be used with individual or even with whole groups of students when a theme of general interest is being discussed.

-Frequently this activity will enable students to see that they do have ideas, will inspire them to extend the writing started by the teacher, and may even lead to individual writing.

The Reluctant Writer at the High School Level

Teachers of reluctant writers at the high school level work with students who have little interest in writing. These students see no particular purpose in writing and are frequently more concerned with graduation than with composition. They feel they will no longer need writing skills when they leave school. For them, writing deals with topics and ideas they feel are irrelevant. Other reluctant writers become frustrated by the writing process. They are overwhelmed with organizing their thoughts into written form, feel uncertain of their writing, or lack mechanical skills.

Assignments in this section deal with these problems. Some assignments encourage students to view writing as a means of self-discovery, problem solving, or personality development. Others deal with life skills, the kinds of writing students will encounter after graduation. All assignments begin with a prewriting activity to aid students in organizing ideas for a final product.

A. Self-Awareness

1. "Weekly Reaction Sheet"

Objectives:

-To encourage self analysis.

-To provide an ongoing writing assignment.

Materials:

Handout (see sample below).

Procedure:

At the end of each week, give each student a reaction sheet. Tell them to respond to each question as completely as possible. The sheets should be collected and saved for each student for future writing activities.

Sample:

Name_____ Week of_____

1. List five things you did this past week that you feel good about.
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.
2. Identify a situation or person who angered you this past week. How did you handle your anger? (What was your reaction?)
   Person/Situation:

   Reaction:
3. Identify two choices you made last week.
   a.
   b.
4. What did you procrastinate about this past week?
5. Name two people who did things to make you feel good. Tell what each person did.
   Person:
   Action:

   Person:
   Action:

6. What plans did you make this week?
7. What was the high point of your week?

Additional Suggestions:

Every four weeks, you may wish to have students write up a monthly reaction report, a "state of myself" review, as they analyze their past weeks' activities. Do they see a pattern? Are they on a high or low? Have they had predominently pleasant or unpleasant experiences?

Source: Robert Hawley, Sidney Simon, and D. D. Britton. Composition For Personal Growth, p. 160-62.

2. "Personal Inventory"

Objectives:

-To encourage self-analysis.

-To motivate students to write from personal experiences.

Materials:

Questionnaire.

Procedure:

Pass out the questionnaire and read through it with the students. Have them circle the response that best fits them.

Sample:

1. How do you react when you're asked a question in class and you don't know the answer?
   A. I make up an answer
   B. I tell the teacher I don't know.
   C. I get embarrassed and don't say anything.
   D. I make a joke about it--laugh it off.

2. How do you feel when someone is unjustly punished?
   A. I get angry, but I don't say anything.
   B. I don't pay any attention to it.
   C. I feel confused by the situation.
   D. I try to help the person out.

3. How do you feel about being corrected by a teacher?
   A. I get mad.
   B. I like to be helped.
   C. I think the teacher is making fun of me.

4. How do you feel about being corrected by your friends?
   A. I feel stupid.
   B. I think they don't like me.
   C. I like their help.
   D. I feel hurt.

5. How do you feel toward a teacher's pet?
   A. I feel jealous of that person.
   B. I admire that person.
   C. I don't have any feelings for that person.
   D. I try to antagonize that person.

6. How does a permissive teacher make you feel?
   A. I love it!
   B. I'm never sure what the teacher wants.
   C. I feel the teacher is cheating me.
   D. I never know how I stand with that teacher.

7. What is your attitude toward a friend who has wronged you?
   A. I want to get back at him.
   B. I feel sorry for that person.
   C. I let it go by without incident.
   D. I get angry with that person.

8. How do you feel about doing chores at home?
   A. I enjoy helping out.
   B. I feel I'm being used.
   C. I don't have any choice; I have to do chores.
   D. I shouldn't be made to do chores.

9. What is your attitude toward strict parental control?
   A. I'm always fighting it.
   B. I have to give in to it.
   C. I feel I can't do anything on my own.
   D. I feel secure.

10. What is your attitude toward death?

A. I'm afraid of it.
B. I'm not sure how I feel.
C. I don't really care one way or the other.
D. I'm looking forward to it.

11. How do you feel when you're with people your age whom you don't know?
A. I try to be carefree.
B. I feel left out.
C. I try to butt in on the conversation.
D. I don't say anything to anyone.

12. How do you respond to being kidded by peers?
A. I kid them back.
B. I make fun of them for doing it.
C. I act hurt.
D. I ignore it.

Additional Suggestions:

Ask the students what they learned about themselves from this questionnaire and to write their responses in a "I learned that I..." format. Discuss which questions were easiest to answer and which were more difficult.

Source: Robert Hawley, Sidney Simon, D. D. Britton. Composition Through Personal Growth, p. 124-28.

3. "An Hour-By-Hour Account Of My Day"

Objective:

To allow students to see exactly how they spend their time and to assess the importance of each hour they spend.

Materials:

Pen and paper.

Procedure:

-Instruct students to choose a day to keep track of their activities on an hourly basis. For example, the first hour they awake, they might include some of the following ideas: took a shower, ate bacon and eggs for breakfast, waited 13 minutes for the bus, saw Herb before first hour, etc.

-A teacher example would be motivating.

-Another source for an example of this technique is the book, A Day in the Life of President Kennedy, by Jim Bishop.

Additional Suggestions:

Have the students ask themselves these questions:

-What part of your day do you enjoy the most?
-When are you the most active?
-What hour is your least favorite and what are you doing at that time?
-Is there a theme to your day?
-Overall, do you like the way you spend your day?

Source: Joan D. Berbich. Writing Logically, p. 11.

4. "Life Line"

Objectives:

-To provide the student with a guide for writing autobiographical ideas.

-To give students an opportunity to expand upon a facet of their life.

Materials:

Large sized newsprint paper.

Procedures:

-After each student has received a sheet of newsprint, tell the class to put their birth date in the lower left-hand corner and current date in the upper right-hand corner. Between these two dates they are to map out their life. It may be a straight line from one date to the next, or it may go through many changes--turns, curves, "detours," and so on.

-Have them label important dates and/or events along the road.

-Some may wish to illustrate their maps.

-Have students anonymously exchange maps so someone else can analyze the map and write up a description of that person.

Additional Suggestions:

Have the students choose a particular event which clearly stands out in their memory and write it as though it were happening to them at the present time. Our Town by Wilder has some examples of this type of writing.

Source: Carl Koch, James M. Brazil. Strategies for Teaching the Composition Process, p. 38.

B. Word Discovery

1. "Word Meanings"

Objectives:

-To show students the meaning of words through context.

Materials:

Copies of Jabberwocky, paper, pen.

Procedure:

-Pass out copies of the poem and have students try reading it aloud.

-Discuss the meaning of the nonsense words. Can they determine which words show action (verbs), which describe (adjectives), and so on?

-Ask the students to describe the words on the basis of their sounds--For example, slithy sounds like slimy.

-Have the students rewrite the poem and substitute familiar words for the nonsense ones. (You may want to have them underline the words which should be repleace.)

-Read the rewritten poems and discuss the various word choices. Does the poem still have the same meaning?

JABBERWOCKY

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgabe.

'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!'

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought--
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood
   The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgery wood,
   And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
   The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
   He went galumping back.

'And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
   Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callah!
   He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
   Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
   And the mome raths outgabe.

Lewis Carroll

2. "Word Choices"

Objective:

-To encourage students' experimentation with word variations that create tone.

Materials:

Sentences with words underlined.

Procedure:

-Pass out the sentences.

-Have students reconstruct the sentences by substituting synonyms for the underlined words in the sentences. Each sentence should be rewritten three-five times.

-Encourage the use of a dictionary and/or thesaurus.

Sample:

The shabby house was a disgrace.

a. The dilapidated building was an eyesore.

b. The run down place was an embarrassment.

c. The decaying structure was an annoyance.

d. The weathered shack was horrendous.

e. The rotting residence was a health hazard.

Additional Suggestions:

-Discuss the connotation of the newly constructed sentences. How is the original meaning the same and yet different. Are some words stronger than others? This procedure may be applied to clauses as well.

-Students rewrite subordinate clauses to show the changes in connotation and meaning.

Example:

When Sam was sick, we had a party.

Because Sam was sick, we had a party.

After Sam was sick, we had a party.

Although Sam was sick, we had a party.

C. Sentence Structure

1. "Kernel Sentences"

Objectives:

-To teach students to add more detail to their sentences.

-To allow students to experiment with different sentence parts.

Materials:

Slips of paper with "kernel" sentences on them. (A kernel sentence is simply a subject and verb.)

Procedure:

-Fold the slips and pass them out randonly.

-Ask students to jot down their sentence on another sheet of paper. Have them add more detail to their sentence by asking questions about the sentence. An example follows:

Kernel sentence: The pinball machine (subject) tilted. (action)

1. What the _____ (subject) 's size and shape?

   The huge, rectangular pinball machine tilted.

2. Where is the _____ (subject) ?

   The huge, rectangular pinball machine at Uncle Stanley's Sandwich Shop tilted.

3. What caused the action?

   The huge, rectangular pinball machine at Uncle Stanley's Sandwich Shop tilted because my friend Zorba leaned into it.

4. What other action was going on at the same time?

   While I went to get more change, the huge, rectangular pinball machine at Uncle Stanley's Sandwich Shop tilted, because my friend Zorba leaned into it.

Additional Suggestions:

You may wish to incorporate parts of speech with this lesson. Instead of asking leading questions, have students add prepositional phrases, subordinate clauses, etc.

2. "Sentence Reduction"

Objectives:

-To show students that length of sentences does not always lead to strength in sentences.

-To have students analyze sentences for their content.

Materials:

Copies of long or wordy sentences.

Procedure:

-Use long, wordy sentences to split into shorter sentences which maintain the same meaning.

Example:

Though it seems unnecessary most of the time and I often make mental notes to avoid doing so, realizing it has become another bad habit I could easily do without, I always, no matter where I am, check twice to make sure I have locked my bike whenever I leave it even for a short time and even if it means walking back a block to make sure.

Rewritten:

I habitually check twice to make sure I have locked my bike.

Additional Suggestions:

-Once the sentences have been rewritten, ask the students

to compare both versions. Does each sentence say the same thing? What kind of effect does the longer version have on a reader? Should it be condensed into smaller units? Have the students discuss the usefulness of expanding and contracting sentences. Help them discover that sentence variety is the key to successful writing.

-Sentence combining activities may also prove to be a helpful tool.

Source: Carl Koch and James Brazil, Strategies for Teaching the Composition Process, p. 69.

D. Paragraphing and Sequencing

1. "Proofreading/Evaluation"

Objective:

- To show students they have the innate ability to recognize good writing techniques.

Materials:

Several samples of good, average, and poor student writing.

Procedure:

-Break the students into groups of three or four.

-Give each group the same set of writing samples (omit names) and instruct each group to read through the samples and individually rate them 1-8 (1 being low, 8 high). This rating should be done on a separate sheet of paper. After every member of the group has rated each writing sample, compare ratings within the group. They should discover that their ratings are close. Discuss the reasonings behind their ratings. After discussing it in groups, gather the class together and compare ratings. Ask the students to list the criteria they used for their ratings. This list can be used as the basis for future evaluation in the class.

2. "A Guide to Our Community"

Objective:

-To have the students write short, informative paragraphs about particular areas/businesses within their community.

Materials:

A map of the local area, brochures of the area.

Procedure:

-Ask the students to pretend they have just moved to the area. What things would they want to know about the area? What would older persons who were new want to know?

-Show them some literature about the area from the Welcome Wagon or Chamber of Commerce. Does it contain the information they need? Would they omit or include other information?

-Ask them to rewrite the brochures for persons their age entering the community. Each student should cover one area or aspect of the community.

-Have them consider what details they should include in their descriptions.

-Have their descriptions printed as a guide and give each student a copy. You may wish to share the guide with the local Welcome Wagon, guidance office, or public library.

Additional Suggestions:

Students may wish to include a map of the area and highlight points of interest.

3. "Awkward Situations"

Objectives:

-To encourage students to explore their reactions in difficult situations.

-To help students order their ideas into paragraphs.

Materials:

Slips of paper containing awkward situations (optional).

Paper and pencil.

Procedure:

-Give each student a situation slip and have them jot down reactions. You may wish to facilitate this by asking questions: How do you feel? What are some thoughts that are going through your mind? How do you deal with your feelings? Reactions?

-After students have compiled a list of ideas, they put the ideas in chronological order. What would happen first, second, and so on. (It may be helpful to have them orally recreate their situation to determine the order of their reactions.)

-Once the list is completed, tell them to write up the experience in a paragraph, using the situation in the opening sentence. (They may wish to elaborate or condense the situation to fit their needs.)

Sample Situations:

1. Imagine it is the bottom of the ninth inning. The other team is winning 7-5. With runners on first and second and two outs, you come up to bat. The pitcher is very fast. You swing your bat a few times and begin to move toward the plate. (You may choose to incorporate "Casey at the Bat" with this situation.)

2. Imagine you are alone when a gang of strange boys approaches and surrounds you. They stare at you in a threatening way.

3. Imagine you have been running for a long time, but someone is chasing you. It is necessary to increase your speed if you are to escape.

4. Imagine you are about to speak or perform before the student body of your school. You wait backstage until it is your turn to speak.

5. Imagine you have almost decided to ask someone you like very much to go to a dance. You don't know whether

or not the person will accept. You sit at the telephone and contemplate what you will say.

Additional Suggestions:

These situations may be used in a free writing excercise. Read the situation and have the students react to it in writing.

E. Paragraph Combining/Written Work

1. "A Spy's Report"

Objectives:

-To help students write objective descriptions.

-To provide students with guides for paying attention to detail.

Materials:

Pencil and Paper.

Procedure:

-Begin the assignment by discussing various detective movies and stories to discover how detectives determine the identity of the criminal. (The criminal leaves something behind, has a particular possession, etc.)

-Instruct the students to become spies. Tell them to list details about their room at home and to bring the list to class the following day. You may wish to provide a sheet with guide questions for them. Be sure they simply list the details and that they do not elaborate on them. When the students bring in their lists of details, have them exchange lists anonymously with another class member so that none of the students know whose list they have.

-Using the list, each student is to write up a "report" of the person using the details on the list. They may note some details which seem related to a particular characteristic, or they may try to determine the nature of the person.

Sample Questions:

Is the bedroom door open or shut? Is the bed made? If so,

how? Are there any objects on the bed? Is there anything under the bed? Look at the walls--are there pictures or other decorations? Specify. What kinds of clothes are in the closet? Is anything out of the ordinary kept in the closet? What kind of shoes are there? What kind of condition are they in? What things are on top of the dresser? Are there any books, magazines in the room?

Additional Suggestions:

Students may wish to write up a report on themselves rather than exchanging lists. Some literary sources for this assignment are Sherlock Holmes stories or J. K. Chesterton's Father Brown Books.

2. "Career Exploration"

Objectives:

-To allow students to learn more about a chosen career.

-To provide students with a variety of writing assignments.

Materials:

-Literature describing various careers.

-Stationery, stamps, and job application forms.

Procedure:

-Discuss possible careers. What considerations do students need to make when choosing a career--monetary gains, geographic location, educational background, working conditions (indoors/outdoors, with people or alone), and so on?

-Make a list of possibilities on the board. Have the students choose one which they find interesting.

-Jot down impressions they have regarding the job or reasons why they feel they could be successful in that career.

-Ask students to locate as much information about the career as possible. Have them consult the guidance office, school library, or someone already in the field.

-Once they have gathered the information, have them create a summary of their findings. They may wish to incorporate their initial considerations for the job to show how right or wrong they were.

-Have them go through the application procedure for the job--letter of inquiry, applications, resumé, etc.

Additional Suggestions:

-Have students interview people in careers they have selected.

-Tell them to write narrative descriptions of the job--a day in the life of a _____.

-Prepare job descritions which could appear in the want-ads.

-Have the students exchange ads and apply for jobs which interest them. Letters are "sent" to the originator of the ad and she returns a letter to the applicant either accepting or rejecting his application.

3. "Consumer Advocate"

Objectives:

-To encourage students to see themselves as consumers.

-To introduce letter writing as a means of communicating.

Materials:

Stationery, envelope, stamp.

Procedure:

-Discuss situations where consumers have been "ripped off."

-Ask students if they have ever purchased a product or received a service which did not meet with their expectations. Were they misled in the situation? Methods of advertising could be included in the discussion to point out some consumer problems. What influences them to try a new product? What do they do if they get stuck with something they are not satisfied with? Keep a list of the comments on the board.

-Have each student recall an experience in which they felt cheated by a company or product. Tell them to sketch out the details of the problem. Include the brandname, the problem inself, and the reason for the problem or concern.

-It might prove useful to discuss the idea of tone in writing. How can they best word the problem and receive proper action? Obviously, the wording should be informative without getting emotional.

-Have the students locate the proper address and send their letters to the company. Be sure the school's return address is the return address for responses they might receive.

Additional Suggestions:

If some students do not have formal complaints, have them send letters of inquiry to the Better Business Bureau or to a consumers' affairs office in your area.

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It is a catalogue! Activities are written by participants in the Teachers and Writers Collaborative. Lots of innovative and unusual ideas. Inspirational reading!

ODE TO THE WILLING WRITER

I can write today because it makes me feel good.

I can write today because the sun is shining.

I can write today because I have something important to say.

I can write today because my paper isn't marked up.

I can write today because I have an audience.

I can write today because my teacher likes my writing.

I can write today because I like to share my thoughts.

I can write today because I like myself.

I can write today because it's a way of reaching other people.

I can write today because I know how to write.

I can write today because I want to write more tomorrow.

I can write today because I want to learn more about myself.

I can write today because no one else writes the way I do.

I can write today because my teacher is a Wisconsin Writing Project graduate.

Robin Staudt

Historically, the best instruction in writing has been for the economically and socially elite. In our culture, reading has become a central goal for the education of the masses. But the ability to write remains a class marker. Waiting until the last years of high school to do something about writing is too late.

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